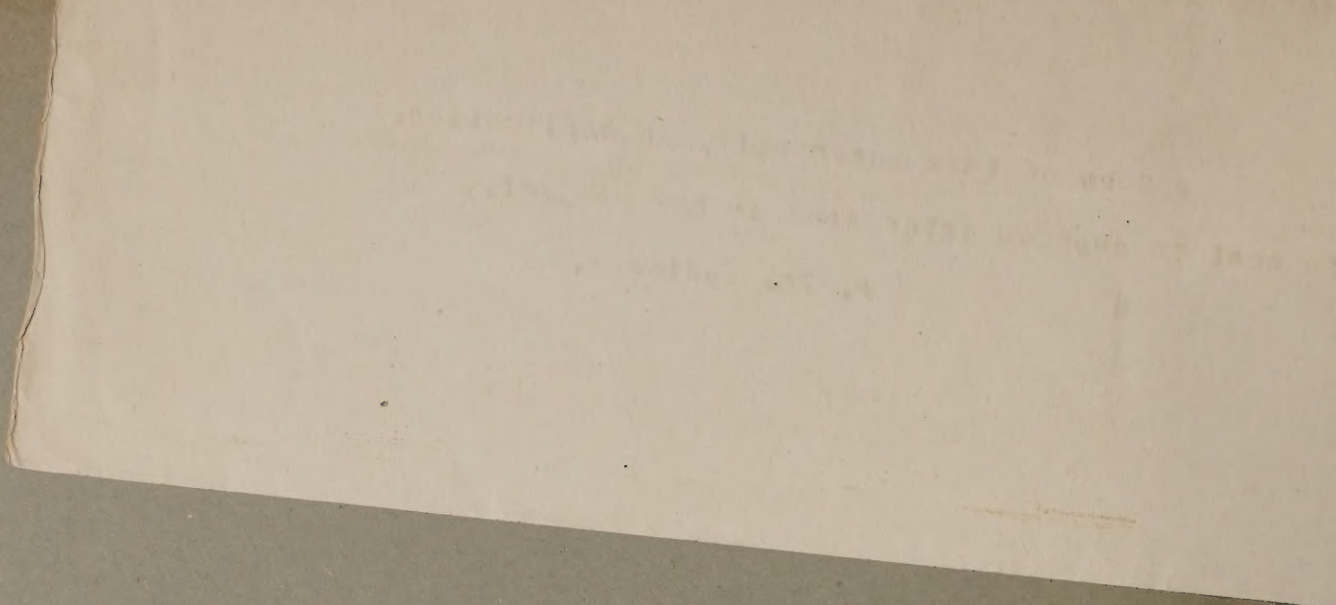


CLASSICS

A copy of this paper will, on application,
be sent to anybody interested in the subject.

P. Th. Justesen.

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[The origin of the
word "galimatias"]

~~San Jose, Iova, June 1925,~~

Dear Sir.

I beg for a few moments to draw your attention to a well known, but still enigmatic word, common to several European languages, „galimatias“, in some languages written „gallimathias“.

Having found, during my studies in Homer, something, that might be proper to throw new light upon the word, I just mentioned, I take the liberty send this little communication to a number of scholars, hoping, that some of them will be kind enough to give me their opinion on the matter.

As far as I am aware, the word „galimatias“ is in rather constant use in the following countries: France, Germany, Denmark and Sweden. In England it seems to be dying out. So the „Concise Oxford Dictionary“ says about it: „Confused or meaningless talk, rigmarole. (F. (formerly half naturalized, now only as foreign word)“. In Holland it is not quite unknown, as it has got a place in the dictionary of van Dale („brabbeltaal, waetaal, onzin“), but I have had the opportunity to state, that very many educated Dutchmen have never heard of it.

Several attempts have been made to explain the origin of the word,, some of them quite missing the stamp of science; but there seems to be unanimity between scholars, that none of these endeavours deserve an earnest consideration, and tha the question is still open.

In the Etymologicum Magnum (Lipsiae 1816) we find the following article:

„Chaliphron: kuriōs ho en methē aphrainōn: chalis gar ho akratos ainos, para to chalan kai anignai a-

Page 10

It is to be noted that the Bill is not a bill of rights, but a bill of powers, in that it is intended to give the Government the power to do what it pleases.

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raruías tas phrenas; ē ho euēthēs para to
kechalasthai tas phrenas: kai tas bacchas
chalimadas elegon, tas chalōmenas pros sun-
ousian: kai chalimazein elegon, to peri tas
sunousias peisthethai: kai pagkalizein, apo
tou chalan tas phrenas pros to pathos, kai
apo tou chalis ho oinos".

In English:

„Chaliphron" : „Properly somebody, mad with strong drink.
The unmixed wine is, indeed, called „cha-
lis", because it makes anarchical and stirs
the orderly mind. The like it is called
„simple", because it relaxes the mind. And
the Bacchantes are called „chalimades" (Dan.
„lösagtig") as being prone to cohabitation,
whereas the being willing in this respect
is called „chalimazein" or „pagchalizein",
because they yield to passion. and there-
fore the wine is called „chalis".

As to „chalis" Liddell-Scott tells us, that
the word is a noun and means „pure wine". There can, how-
ever, be no doubt, that in this passage the meaning must
be different. In the beginning of the article we learn
„chalis ho akratos oinos", which should then mean „the un-
mixed wine is pure", which can hardly be the idea of the
author, and the last sentence tells us generally: „chalis
ho oinos", „the wine is pure".

Not wishing to go into particularities a-
bout the several interesting members of the „chal"-family,
I will just point to the fact, that the Sanscritic root
„gal" means „to drop", „to cause to drop", which is also
the fundamental idea of all the Greek „chal"-words: „cha-
laō, chalis, chalimazō, chalepainō, chaleptō" and others,
all involving the loosening of the reins of the mind, the
„letting go". Absolutely the same is the case with words
of the same root in several European languages, but quite
specially in the Scandinavian ones. The Danish word „gal"

- the most important one of a large series - is identical with the Sanscritic root and means (comp. „chalēpos”) „mad, angry, exceedingly eager, wild, drunk”, also „able to make drunk” („ēalt öl”, comp. „chalis ho akratos oinos”).

Taking this fact into account I would dare to translate „chalis” by „maddening”.

According to Liddell-Scott (1901) Eustatius defines „chalimas” as „hē hupo methēs chalomenē”, and Hesychius calls the chalimades „aischunontai kai thraseiai” („impudent and brutal”), and Suidas calls them „parnai”. Lastly Schol. Ap. Rhod. 1.473 cites Aesch. (Fr.388) as calling the Bacchantes „chalimias” (v.l. „chalidas”), where Herm. would restore „chal-eimades” laxivestes, cf. Eur. Bacch. 935.

Taking everything together we may state, that „chalimazō” means: „I am drunk or mad with wine”, and „chalimazeis” consequently „you are mad”. But from „chalimazeis” to „ēalimathias” there is only a very small step indeed. We are certainly entitled to substitute „ē” for „ch” and „th” for „z”; and then there is left only to place „ia” for „ei”.

Now I suppose, that the Greek (and their followers), when somebody was talking nonsense, simply said: „chalimazeis”, „you are mad”, and that the expression survived the knowledge about its real meaning, which compelled some purist of a later age to give it at least partially a meaning, altering „mazeis” into „Mathias”.

Hoping to hear the opinion of scholars and very much obliged for any suggestion or information, I might be favoured with, I am, Sir

yours sincerely

P. Th. Justesen.

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